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INFO AMEMBASSY ABUJA

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USEUCOM AIDES VAIHINGEN GE

UNCLAS YAOUNDE 000706

FOR DS/IP/AF, AF/C AND DS/DSS/OSAC, LAGOS AND ABUJA FOR RSO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ASEC KSAC CM

SUBJECT: ATTACK ON U.S. OIL SHIPPING VESSEL NEAR THE  
ENTRANCE OF THE DOUALA PORT

REF: MANCHESTER-WILLIAMS TELCON AND EMAIL

¶1. (U) Summary: On July 08, 2008, RSO received information from Douala-based Captain Richard Manchester (who is in charge of security for Tidewater Marine International, Inc. West Africa and Schlumberger Area UIC Dock Wouri River) about the attack on their vessel MV Gulf Fleet No. 103 by armed pirates at 0200 on July 2, 2008. The MV Gulf Fleet No. 103 is owned by Tidewater Marine Service, Inc. which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Tidewater Inc, a U.S. corporation registered in Delaware and with its headquarters in New Orleans, Louisiana. Douala is the port city for Cameroon and is the busiest port in Central Africa. The port is accessed via the Wouri River estuary. All ship-based U.S cargo bound for Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, and Congo transit this sea port as well as numerous other foreign vessels and cargo.

¶2. (U) The vessel was in position latitude 03 46' North, Longitude 009 19" East or about 5 miles West from the Wouri River Entrance Buoy. The vessel was en route from TOTAL's offshore drilling and a production field bound for the port of Douala when gunshots were heard around 0200. The crew went outside and observed a locally made fiberglass speed boat approximately 12 meters in length which had been tied up along the port side below the rescue boat and two pirates making their way onboard. Two other pirates were already onboard with automatic weapons. A total of five pirates boarded the vessel and all carried weapons. They were of African decent who spoke English and wore black bandannas covering their forehead and heads. It is estimated that they were between 20-25 years of age.

¶3. (U) The Chief Officer was instructed to stop the vessel and comply. All crew members were robbed of their money and personal belongings, several work vests, one fire ax, and four portable VHF radios were stolen (one Motorola and three vessel owned). Shots were fired during the robbery to intimidate the victims and damage some of the electrical equipment. It is reported that some of the crew sought refuge in the engine room where the pirates did not visit. The pirates left via the same craft they arrived in at 0230 and headed toward the shoreline opposite the Douala port. One engineer was injured as he was struck on the back of his shoulder with a gun and on his legs before being pushed

inside his cabin. Vessel damage consisted of gun shots from at least six bullets fired onboard.

¶4. (U) As a result of this incident, Tidewater has restricted the nighttime operation of its fifteen (15) vessels presently being operated out of Douala port. This safety based restriction is very understandable and very disruptive to all of their customers who include TOTAL, Pecten, Perenco, and Eurooil. The U.S. Embassy will inform the police and Cameroonian Navy of this incident and explore options of putting Cameroonian Naval assets near the Douala port to establish a security zone.

¶5. (U) POC for this cable is RSO Laura D. Williams.

GARVEY